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ABSTRACT

Studies which have investigated males' and females' attitudes and behavior in organizations have yielded apparently contradictory results. In some studies, individuals have followed traditional sex-role stereotypes; in others, they have not. A proposed explanation for these inconsistencies is that sex-role identification is a more important variable than sex. Individuals who adhere to the stereotypes may be highly sex-typed (masculine or feminine), and those who do not may be less sex-typed (androgynous or undifferentiated) in sex-role identification. One hundred-ten graduate students with jobs in the business community and 575 undergraduate business students completed the Bem Sex-Role Inventory containing "masculine"--self-reliant, competitive--and "feminine"--sympathetic, shy--characteristics for both themselves and a "good manager." As expected, individuals' sex-role identifications significantly affected their perceptions of traits desirable for management personnel, while sex had virtually no effect. The study concludes that sex-role identification is a variable deserving of further attention, particularly when sex-related differences are examined. Also, graduate women revealed more masculine traits than feminine in their self-descriptions, suggesting that a masculine standard for management may nullify the femininity of women in or aspiring to management positions. (Author)

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SEX AND SEX-ROLE IDENTIFICATION: AN IMPORTANT DISTINCTION FOR ORGANIZATIONAL RESEARCH[1]

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Sex and Sex-Role Identification:

An Important Distinction for Organizational Research

With the current influx of women into managerial positions, the relationship between sex of the leader, leader behavior or perceptions of leader behavior, and outcome variables such as leader effectiveness and subordinate satisfaction assumes increasing importance. This relationship has been much investigated in recent years, but the findings have been apparently contradictory, e.g.:

1. Leadership style and effectiveness. Several studies found no sex differences in leadership styles exhibited (Day & Stogdill, 1972; Chapman, 1975; Osborn & Vicars, 1976). Bartol and Butterfield (1976) found sex differences in evaluations of styles, with consideration valued more highly for female leaders and initiating structure for male leaders which reversed direction and then disappeared in later replications (Butterfield & Bartol, 1977; Butterfield & Powell, 1977). Others concluded that the sex of both leader and subordinate moderate the relationship between leadership style and evaluation of leader effectiveness (Rosen & Jerdee, 1973) and between leadership style and subordinate satisfaction (Petty & Lee, 1975).

2. Perceived characteristics of a good manager. Schein (1973, 1975) found agreement by male and female managers on a decidedly masculine profile of the successful manager. However, Schermerhorn et al. (1975) found that males prefer a more masculine manager and females a "neutral" manager. In a similar vein, Rosenkrantz et al. (1968) and Broverman et al. (1970, 1972) found that males and females agree on the socially desirable characteristics of adults as masculine. In a later study, Kravetz (1976) found a

shift away from sex-role stereotypes in the description of healthy adults by a sample of women and attributed the shift to the influence of the women's liberation movement in the 1970's.

Sex-role stereotypes were traditionally defined as the sum of socially designated behaviors that differentiate between men and women (Broverman et al., 1972). They specified that men should behave in a "masculine" fashion (e.g., unemotional, dominant, independent, aggressive, acts like a leader) while women should behave in a "feminine" fashion (e.g., sympathetic, sensitive to the needs of others, shy, gentle, tactful). In some of the studies cited, individuals have followed traditional sex-role stereotypes. In other studies, they have not. Osborn and Vicars (1976) proposed as an explanation that sex-role-stereotypic differences may appear in laboratory studies which do not appear in field studies.

The present study proposed an alternative explanation for these inconsistent results, that sex-role identification is the operating variable rather than sex. Males and females who think or behave in accordance with sex-role stereotypes may be highly sex-typed (masculine or feminine) in sex-role identification themselves. Individuals who do not adhere to the stereotypes may be less sex-typed (androgynous or undifferentiated) in sex-role identification. Thus the effect of leader or evaluator sex-role identification on variables related to leadership may be independent of and actually overshadow the effect of leader or evaluator sex.

Considering the sex-role identification variable further, Bem (1974, 1977) argued that masculinity and femininity represent complementary domains of positive traits and behaviors and that it is possible for an individual of either sex to be both masculine and feminine, or instrumental and expres-

sive, depending on the given situation. The concept of androgyny, refering to a high propensity of both feminine and masculine characteristics in an individual, dictates that behaviors or traits should not be associated with a specific sex; instead, it is each individual's sex-role identity, not sex, which may magnify the degree to which certain traits and behaviors are manifested.

The purpose of the present study was to determine the influences of sex and sex-role identification of the evaluator on the perceived characteristics of a good manager. Specifically, it was hypothesized that:

1. Individuals' perceptions of a good manager are affected by their own sex-role identifications as androgynous, masculine, feminine, or undifferentiated.

2. The effect of sex-role identification on individuals' perceptions of a good manager is a) greater than and b) independent of the effect of sex.

METHOD

Sample

The sample was composed of 110 part-time (evening) graduate MBA students, nearly all of whom held full-time jobs, and 575 undergraduate business students attending courses at various universities. The graduate students had a median age of 26.8 years; were 82% male; and 40% reported having been a manager at some time. The undergraduate students had a median age of 20.2 years; were 70% male; and 21% reported having been a manager at some time.

Measurement Instrument

Bem (1974) developed an instrument to assess individuals' sex-role identification which was used in the study. The Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) contains 20 phrases characteristic of the masculine sex-role stereotype (e.g., self-reliant, defends own beliefs, ambitious), 20 phrases characteristic of the feminine sex-role stereotype (e.g., sympathetic, yielding, shy), and 20 phrases not associated exclusively with either stereotype (e.g., helpful, conscientious, conceited). Each individual completed the BSRI both for him/herself and a good manager. Ratings on the items were made on a seven-point scale, ranging from 1 (never or almost never true) to 7 (always or almost always true).

Procedure

A questionnaire containing the BSRI for both the respondent and a good manager was administered during the first class of each course. It was introduced as an instrument intended to "solicit your views on management before they are influenced by the course" and took individuals approximately 15 minutes to complete. Summary statistics of item scores for each course were returned to the instructor for use later in the semester.

Scoring of Instrument

Masculinity and femininity "self-scores" were calculated for each individual as the average of scores on the masculine and feminine items in his/her self-description. The median masculinity and femininity self-scores were then calculated for the entire sample combined, with graduate females, undergraduate females, and graduate males weighted more heavily

than undergraduate males to equalize their numbers statistically as recommended by Bem and Watson (1976). Once the median masculinity and femininity self-scores were determined, individuals were classified as follows:

		Masculinity Self-Score	
		Below Median	Above Median
Femininity Self-Score	Above Median	Feminine	Androgynous
	Below Median	Undifferentiated	Masculine

This classification was called the individual's own sex-role group or "self-group."

Masculinity and feminity "ideal-scores" were calculated from each individual's description of a good manager using the same procedure as for the self-description. The good-manager description was classified as androgynous, masculine, feminine, or undifferentiated according to the median masculinity and femininity self-scores, i.e., the same medians as those used to classify individuals into self-groups. This classification was called the individual's "ideal group."

The decision not to establish the ideal-groups on the basis of the ideal-score medians is worthy of note. It was necessary for the purpose of the study to compare how individuals described a good manager and how they described themselves. Using the same set of medians for the creation of the self-groups and ideal-groups allowed this comparison to be made easily.

RESULTS

Since undergraduate and graduate students differed sharply in age, education, and work experience, results were determined separately for the two groups and then compared.

Self-Descriptions

Individuals' self-descriptions were analyzed to investigate whether the basic premises of the BSRI (Bem, 1974) held for the sample in the study. Most basic and the reason for its existence is the premise that males tend to see themselves more in masculine terms than females and females tend to see themselves more in feminine terms than males. Table 1 presents self-scores as expected only for undergraduate students. Undergraduate males were more masculine than feminine and females more feminine than masculine; and the males scored significantly higher on masculinity and lower on femininity than the females. In contrast, both male and female graduate students were more masculine than feminine, and differences in scores by sex were in the expected direction but insignificant. Table 2 presents results for self-group distributions. Masculine and feminine proportions were significantly different from random in the expected direction for all except female graduate students; also, the difference in distributions by sex was significant for both undergraduates and graduates. Support of the premise for at least one of the groups of subjects indicated that the condition Bem set out to measure still existed and that further investigation of the effects of sex-role identification was warranted.

Another basic premise underlying the BSRI is that masculinity and fem-

ininity scores are logically independent. The correlations between masculinity and femininity self-scores were insignificant for both graduates ($r = -.05$ for males, .11 for females) and undergraduates ($r = .03$ for males, -.03 for females), supporting the independence of the two scores. The above results, then, corroborated the basic premises of the BSRI in an overall sense.

Effect of Sex-Role Identification on Good-Manager Descriptions

Hypothesis 1, stating that individuals' own sex-role identifications influence their perceptions of a good manager, were supported by results presented in Tables 3a and 3b. The significant chi-square values demonstrated the existence of a relationship between self-group and ideal-group membership. Two additional measures of strength of relationship were examined, Cramer's V and Pearson's Contingency Coefficient C (Blalock, 1972). The values of V and C indicated a moderate-strong relationship between the two variables.

Hypothesis 1 was also supported by analysis of correlations between self-scores and ideal-scores on masculinity and femininity. Strong correspondence was observed between comparable self-scores and ideal-scores for undergraduate and graduate males and females, as the correlations ranged from .30 to .71 and all but one were significant at the .001 level.

The nature of the relationship between self-group and ideal-group membership was discerned from the data in Tables 3a and 3b. As seen in Row 1 of Table 3a, the percentage of androgynous ideal-group membership was higher in the androgynous self-group than in any other self-group. Analogous results held for the other self-groups: The percentage of masculine

ideal-group membership was highest in the masculine self-group, etc. Only Row 3 of Table 3b with very small numbers deviated from this pattern.

The significance of these results was determined by applying a significance test for the difference between two proportions (Bruning & Kintz, 1968). Within each row, the underlined percentage was matched with each of the other three percentages. For example, the following question was asked for Row 2 of Table 3a: "Is the 83.5% masculine ideal-group membership significantly higher than 1) the 68.5% membership for the androgynous self-group, 2) the 55.4% membership for the feminine self-group, and 3) 65.1% membership for the undifferentiated self-group?" All three differences in proportions were significant at the .001 level, and the question was answered yes as indicated. Differences in ideal-group proportions were significant for three of five rows tested and close to significant for a fourth ($p = .052$ for Row 2, Table 3b). This analysis demonstrated that individuals tend to describe a good manager in the same sex-role terms as themselves.

Comparison of Effects of Sex-Role Identification and Sex

Hypothesis 2a, stating that the effect of sex-role identification on individuals' perceptions of a good manager is greater than the effect of sex, was supported by data in Tables 3 and 4. The effect of varying sex on individuals' ideal-group memberships was insignificant, while the effect of varying self-group membership was significant and considerable in comparison.

Hypothesis 2a was also supported by the results of Two-Way ANOVA using masculinity and femininity ideal-scores separately as dependent variables (Table 5). The main effect of self-group was significant at the .001 level

in three cases and at the .01 level in the fourth. The main effect of sex was insignificant in all cases.

Hypothesis 2b, stating that the effect of sex-role identification is independent of the sex effect, was supported by additional results presented in Table 5. The lack of significant interaction between self-group and sex in three of four cases, combined with the support for Hypothesis 2a, warranted a conclusion that individuals' sex-role identifications affected their perceptions of a good manager independently of whether they were male or female.

DISCUSSION

The results supported speculation made earlier in the paper: Perhaps sex is not as critical in determining leadership styles and effects as researchers have hypothesized it to be, and sex-role identification should demand their attention instead. There were no major differences in support for hypotheses between undergraduates and graduates, most of whom were working full-time in organizations with many in managerial positions. Graduate women and men, who basically agree on self-descriptions, differed by sex-role identification and not sex in good-manager descriptions. Even though undergraduates differed by sex according to traditional sex-role stereotypes in their self-descriptions, they also differed by sex-role identification rather than sex in their good-manager descriptions. Regardless of similarities or differences in self-descriptions, testing of hypotheses yielded very similar findings for all groups.

The results also supported the assertion that there is no theoretical

reason why males and females should differ in sex-stereotypic terms. Innumerable studies have hypothesized that males and females think or behave differently based on traditional sex-role stereotypes. The present study concluded instead that individuals who fit different sex-role stereotypes are likely to think or behave differently. Again, there is a difference between an individual's biological classification as male or female and the sex-role classification which best fits the individual.

Lack of sex-stereotypic differences was particularly observed in the self-descriptions of graduates. Contrary to what sex-role stereotypes would prescribe, graduate women were more masculine than feminine overall in self-scores. A belief that a masculine manager is preferable, reflected in these results (Table 4) and other studies (Schein, 1973, 1975), may have affected women's decisions on applying to graduate business programs so that primarily masculine women entered the programs. Also, selection criteria for the programs or for sponsorship of further education by their companies may have led to masculine women receiving preferential treatment; this explanation extends reasoning used by Schein (1973) to account for the relative scarcity of women in management. A standard that masculine is best in management may have nullified the feminine sex-role standard for the women in or aspiring to management positions.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that sex-role identification is a variable deserving of further attention in research on organizations, particularly in studies which examine sex-related effects on leadership styles and related outcome variables. In the present days of heightened sensitivity by all concerning male-female issues in organizations, this is a very timely finding.

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TABLE 1

Self-Scores Classified by Sex

	Undergraduate			Graduate		
	Males (N=404)	Females (N=170)	F	Males (N=90)	Females (N=20)	F
Mean Self-Scores:						
Masculinity	5.21	4.73	67.90***	5.37	5.23	.90
Femininity	4.50	4.93	86.07***	4.46	4.65	2.44

***p < .001

TABLE 2

Self-Group Classified by Sex

	Undergraduate				Graduate			
	Males		Females		Males		Females	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Self-Group:								
Androgynous	88	21.8	38	22.4	25	27.8	8	40.0
Masculine	148	36.6[1]	15	8.8[2]	41	45.5[1]	3	15.0
Feminine	59	14.6[2]	80	47.1[1]	6	6.7[2]	4	20.0
Undifferentiated	109	27.0	37	21.7	18	20.0	5	25.0
Totals	404	100.0	170	100.0	90	100.0	20	100.0
	Chi-square = 85.93 with 3 degrees of freedom ($p < .001$) Cramer's V = .39 Contingency Coefficient C = .36				Chi-square = 8.03 with 3 degrees of freedom ($p < .05$) Cramer's V = .27 Contingency Coefficient C = .26			

[1]Proportion larger than random, $p < .001$.

[2]Proportion smaller than random, $p < .001$.

TABLE 3

Ideal-Group Classified by Self-Group[1]

a. Undergraduate

	Self-group: Androgynous		Masculine		Feminine		Undifferent.		Totals	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Ideal-Group:										
Androgynous	40	31.5	9	5.5	38	27.3	10	6.8	97	16.9
Masculine	87	68.5	136	83.5**	77	55.4[2]	95	65.1	395	68.7
Feminine	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	3.6[2]	3	2.1	8	1.4
Undifferentiated	0	0.0	18	11.0	19	13.7	38	26.0**	75	13.0
Totals	127	100.0	163	100.0	139	100.0	146	100.0	575	100.0

Chi-Square = 100.62 with 9 degrees of freedom ($p < .001$)
Cramer's V = .24[3]
Contingency Coefficient C = .39[4]

b. Graduate

	Self-group: Androgynous		Masculine		Feminine		Undifferent.		Totals	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Ideal-Group:										
Androgynous	14	42.4**	3	6.8	1	10.0	3	13.0	21	19.1
Masculine	18	54.6	40	90.9	8	80.0	15	65.3[2]	81	73.6
Feminine	1	3.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	4.3[2]	2	1.8
Undifferentiated	0	0.0	1	2.3	1	10.0	4	17.4[2]	6	5.5
Totals	33	100.0	44	100.0	10	100.0	23	100.0	110	100.0

Chi-Square = 28.51 with 9 degrees of freedom ($p < .001$)
Cramer's V = .29[3]
Contingency Coefficient C = .45[4]

**$p < .001$

[1]Largest percentage in each row is underlined. Degree of significance shown is that for least significant difference between underline percentage and each other percentage in the row.

[2]Significance not determined due to small numbers in row.

[3]Cramer's V varies from 0 to 1.

[4]Pearson's Contingency Coefficient C varies from 0 to .87 for the 4 x 4 tables.

TABLE 4

Ideal-Group Classified by Sex

	Undergraduate				Graduate			
	Males		Females		Males		Females	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Ideal-Group:								
Androgynous	66	16.3	31	18.2	19	21.1	2	10.0
Masculine	281	69.6	113	66.5	65	72.2	16	80.0
Feminine	4	1.0	4	2.4	2	2.2	0	0.0
Undifferentiated	53	13.1	22	12.9	4	4.5	2	10.0
Totals	404	100.0	170	100.0	90	100.0	20	100.0

Chi-square = 2.02 with 3 degrees of freedom (p = n.s.)
Cramer's V = .06
Contingency Coefficient C = .06

Chi-square = 2.56 with 3 degrees of freedom (p = n.s.)
Cramer's V = .15
Contingency Coefficient C = .15

TABLE 5

Effect of Self-Group and Sex on Ideal-Scores

	Two-Way Analysis of Variance		
	Main Effect of Sex F	Main Effect of Self-Group F	Interaction Effect F
Undergraduate Ideal-Scores:			
Masculinity	.01	29.81***	1.28
Femininity	2.29	30.51***	.99
Graduate Ideal-Scores:			
Masculinity	.07	4.34**	4.15**
Femininity	.46	10.09***	1.70

**p < .01
***P < .001